

**Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, January 1, 1796,
The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes.
Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester
Ford.**

TO JAMES MADISON MAD. MSS.

Jan. 1. 97.

Yours of Dec. 19. has come safely. The event of the election has never been a matter of doubt in my mind. I knew that the Eastern states were disciplined in the schools of their town meetings to sacrifice differences of opinion to the great object of operating in phalanx, & that the more free & moral agency practiced in the other states would always make up the supplement of their weight. Indeed the vote comes much nearer an equality than I had expected. I know the difficulty of obtaining belief to one's declarations of a disinclination to honors, & that it is greatest with those who still remain in the world. But no arguments were wanting to reconcile me to a relinquishment of the first office or acquiescence under the second. As to the first it was impossible that a more solid unwillingness settled on full calculation, could have existed in any man's mind, short of the degree of absolute refusal. The only view on which I would have gone into it for awhile was to put our vessel on her republican tack before she should be thrown too much to leeward of her true principles. As to the second, it is the only office in the world about which I am unable to decide in my own mind whether I had rather have it or not have it. Pride does not enter into the estimate; for I think with the Romans that the general of today should be a soldier tomorrow if necessary. I can particularly have no feelings which would revolt at a secondary position to Mr. Adams. I am his junior in life, was his junior in Congress, his junior in the diplomatic line, his junior lately in the civil government. Before the receipt

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of your letter I had written the enclosed one to him. I had intended it some time, but had deferred it from time to time under the discouragement of a despair of making him believe I could be sincere in it. The papers by the last post not rendering it necessary to change anything in the letter I enclose it open for your perusal, not only that you may possess the actual state of dispositions between us, but that if anything should render the delivery of it ineligible in your opinion, you may return it to me. If mr. Adams can be induced to administer the government on it's true principles, & to relinquish his bias to an English constitution, it is to be considered whether it would not be on the whole for the public good to come to a good understanding with him as to his future elections. He is perhaps the only sure barrier against Hamilton's getting in.

Since my last I have received a packet of books & pamphlets, the choiceness of which testifies that they come from you. The incidents of Hamilton's insurrection is a curious work indeed. The hero of it exhibits himself in all the attitudes of a dexterous balance master.

The Political progress is a work of value & of a singular complexion. The eye of the author seems to be a natural achromatic, which divests every object of the glare of colour. The preceding work under the same title had the same merit. One is disgusted indeed with the ulcerated state which it presents of the human mind: but to cure an ulcer we must go to its bottom: & no writer has ever done this more radically than this one. The reflections into which he leads one are not flattering to our species. In truth I do not recollect in all the animal kingdom a single species but man which is eternally & systematically engaged in the destruction of its own species. What is called civilization seems to have no other effect on him than to teach him to pursue the principle of *bellum omnium in omnia* on a larger scale, & in place of the little contests of tribe against tribe, to engage all the quarters of the earth in the same work of destruction. When we add to this that as to the other species of animals, the lions & tigers are mere lambs compared with man as a destroyer, we must conclude that it is in man alone that nature has been able to find a sufficient barrier against the too great multiplication of other animals & of man himself, an equilibrating power against the fecundity of generation. My situation points my views chiefly to his wars in the

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physical world: yours perhaps exhibit him as equally warring in the moral one. We both, I believe, join in wishing to see him softened. Adieu.¹

¹ Statement from memory, of a letter I wrote to James Madison: copy omitted to be retained.

Monticello, Jan. 1, 97.

Yours of Dec. 19 is safely received. I never entertained a doubt of the event of the election. I knew that the eastern troops were trained in the schools of their town meetings to sacrifice little differences of opinion to the solid advantages of operating in phalanx, and that the more free and moral agency of the other States would fully supply their deficiency. I had no expectation, indeed, that the vote would have approached so near an equality. It is difficult to obtain full credit to declarations of disinclination to honors, and most so with those who still remain in the world But never was there a more solid unwillingness, founded on rigorous calculation, formed in the mind of any man, short of peremptory refusal. No arguments, therefore, were necessary to reconcile me to a relinquishment of the first office, or acceptance of the second. No motive could have induced me to undertake the first, but that of putting our vessel upon her republican tack, and preventing her being driven too far to leeward of her true principles. And the second is the only office in the world about which I cannot decide in my own mind, whether I had rather have it or not have it. Pride does not enter into the estimate. For I think with the Romans of old, that the General of to-day should be a common soldier to-morrow, if necessary. But as to Mr. Adams, particularly, I could have no feelings which would revolt at being placed in a secondary station to him. I am his junior in life, I was his junior in Congress, his junior in the diplomatic line, and lately his junior in our civil government. I had written him the enclosed letter before the receipt of yours. I had intended it for some time, but had put it off, from time to time, from the discouragement of despair to make him believe me sincere. As the information by the last post does not make it necessary to change anything in the letter, I enclose it open for your perusal, as well that you may be possessed of the true

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state of dispositions between us, as that if there be any circumstance which might render its delivery ineligible, you may return it to me. If Mr. Adams could be induced to administer the government on its true principles, quitting his bias for an English constitution, it would be worthy consideration whether it would not be for the public good, to come to a good understanding with him as to his future elections. He is the only sure barrier against Hamilton's getting in. . . .

The *Political Progress* is a work of value and of a singular complexion. The author's eye seems to be a natural achromatic, divesting every object of the glare of color. The former work of the same title possessed the same kind of merit. They disgust one, indeed, by opening to his view the ulcerated state of the human mind. But to cure an ulcer you must go to the bottom of it, which no author does more radically than this. The reflections into which it leads us are not very flattering to the human species. In the whole animal kingdom I recollect no family but man, steadily and systematically employed in the destruction of itself. Nor does what is called civilization produce any other effect, than to teach him to pursue the principle of the *bellum omnium in omnia* on a greater scale, and instead of the little contest between tribe and tribe, to comprehend all the quarters of the earth in the same work of destruction. If to this we add, that as to other animals, the lions and tigers are mere lambs compared with man as a destroyer, we must conclude that nature has been able to find in man alone a sufficient barrier against the too great multiplication of other animals and of man himself, an equilibrating power against the fecundity of generation. While in making these observations, my situation points my attention to the welfare of man in the physical world, yours may perhaps present him as equally warring in the moral one. Adieu. Yours affectionately.